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Agnosticism and Deism Explained

Pantheism Underlies all Forms of Modern Unbelief--What It Affirms and Denies--Its Relation to Agnosticism and Atheism.

(Written for The Intermountain Catholic.)

The Gentiles, after they separated from the synagogue, lapsed into Pantheism, which underlies all forms of modern unbelief. Derived from Greek pans—pas (all) and theos (God)—Pantheism means that God is the only substance, of which this universe and man are only manifestations, or that the material universe, taken in its totality, is God. It denies creation, also that God is separate and distinct from the combined forces and laws of nature. Modern unbelievers would make the infinite and eternal energy which underlies nature their only God, and whilst denying that they are atheists, yet their agnosticism or pantheism, when pressed to their logical conclusion, namely, no God distinct from nature, who is its creator, is atheism.

Fetichism is another corruption of pantheism, and consists in the worship of some object which does not represent any living figure, such as stones, arms, vessels, etc. Modern unbelievers, writing of the progress of the human race, have made the primitive religion of man in the last mentioned and maintain that as the human family progressed intellectually they advanced, too, in the religious scale, that is, from fetichism to pantheism, from which the Jews derived their sublime idea of one God, the creator of all things. For this subversion of history no proof is given. Why? Because there is none.

The oldest historical record is the book of Genesis, and in that is contained the idea of one God, the creator of all. This was the original idea taught and believed by the patriarchs, continued in the synagogue and perpetuated in the New Law. Pantheism, fetichism, together with all the grosser superstitions, were retrograde movements from the primitive idea of God. Any assumption to the contrary is historically false.

All false religions presuppose a common origin, and when analyzed will be found to contain some of the original ideas that began in Paradise. Pantheism or atheism could not have sprung into existence prior to the Hebrew faith in Jehovah, the incommunicable name given to the divine and eternal essence, namely, "He who is, and who was, and that is to come." This Catholic faith in the Godhead, which is coeval and coextensive with the history of the human race, must necessarily antedate the denial of the atheist and the pantheist and agnostic teaching which identifies and makes God inseparable from the material universe.

A denial is always subsequent to an affirmation, for one cannot deny what has never been asserted. The agnostic's "I do not know" is not the question to be debated, but their leaders' theories which make God simply an eternal energy and force inseparable from and dependant on the universe, or their denial of a personal God—all of which presuppose the ancient Hebrew faith, still taught by the Catholic church. The church is in possession and cannot be dispossessed by simple denial.

The profession at worst is superior in its consequences to the denial at its very best. The simple rustic believing in a supreme being who will reward the good in the unseen world and for all eternity, is happier in his thoughts and prospects of future happiness than ever were Spinoza, the father of modern unbelief, or Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, Kant, Tyndall, Spencer or Huxley. The simple, confiding faith of the former is implanted in the soul by his parents. It has come down through all past ages from father to child, and against its prescriptive rights the agnostic has no arguments and can only say "I do not know."

It is a superstition, say modern unbelievers, and to dispel all darkness is the mission of modern progress. It does not follow because superstitions have been connected with the belief in a supreme being and future existence, that these beliefs themselves are superstitions. On the contrary, the logical inference would be that religion, pure and unadulterated, must be first, as the genuine coin must be prior to the spurious.

Has the agnostic any truth which stands opposed to the earliest known religion as revealed in Genesis? There is no scientific investigation or development that contradicts the account given of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. There may be theories, like those of modern unbelievers, but not facts. Darkness is not dispelled by simple opinions or hypotheses which change every few years. The systems of worship in the world are many, the religious creeds are numberless, and to separate the true from the false—what is superstitious from the real—may be difficult; but to ascribe all to ignorance, as our intellectual sovereigns do, is as unjust as it is historically false. Their inability to prove atheism, which in the Catholic sense includes agnosticism and pantheism, they admit.

John Fiske, a disciple and admirer of Herbert Spencer, referring to God and religion in a lecture delivered at Harvard college, said:

"We are now in a region where absolute demonstration, in the scientific sense, is impossible. It is beyond the power of science to prove that a personal God either exists or does not exist."

What follows from this admission? That the darkness is not yet dispelled, nor is the ignorance of our ancestors yet removed. The age is reaping some of the effects of the boasted liberty, which means for the anarchist freedom from all recognized authority.

This liberty, with its concomitant evils, weighed in the scale with the humble submission of the true worshiper of the Deity, one who strives to secure his eternal salvation, gathers about organized society thicker and darker clouds through its discordant members than all the supposed darkness brought on by religious belief. And as it is only in its effects agnosticism can be truly tested, its efforts to destroy that religious faith which has ever been close to the heart of the human race and which is interwoven with the entire fabric of human history, can only result in disorder and multiplying the miseries of human life. Of its effects in the future life, no one dares think.

(To be continued.)

MISSIONS IN IDAHO.

Father Hendricks Expounding the Truth to Mormons.

In the Pittsburg Observer we find an account of Father Hendricks's work among the Latter-day Saints in our neighboring state of Idaho. Father Hendrickx is the resident pastor of Montpelier, Ida., but has been given permission to carry out this missionary work. The Observer says:

Father Hendrickx has undertaken to go to these people, as they are settled in their small valleys in Idaho, and preach the truths of the Catholic church to them. Already has he made many converts among them. To enable him to do this work the more effectually, the Catholic Missionary union grants him a subsidy of $500 a year.

Father Hendrickx is apostolic in his ways of living, content with meager fare and hard bed and all sorts of inconvenience, and even in the heats of summer he is active in his missionary journeying. Writing to Shoshone, Lincoln county, Idaho, of a recent trip he said: "The priest of that place, Rev. L. Godschalx, had leased the pavilion for the speaking. The large building was filled to the doors, the preachers also being present, great interest was manifested and the mission ary had to promise to return as soon as possible. A good many careless Catholics approached the Sacraments.

"After the mission was over, we crossed the sagebrush desert to Hagerman, a camp near the Snake river, thirty miles distant from Shoshone. There was a large audience in the town hall. One of the many questions asked was as follows: "Can a priest pray a soul out of Purgatory for $5?" In Hagerman are about 120 Mormon families. Two converts were made. Others are reading tracts and Catholic books. The prospect for Hagerman is very bright.

"Two days later on we preached in the opera house at Mountain Home, Elmore county, 185 miles from Mountain home and twenty-six miles from the nearest railway station. Great crowds came to listen to the remarks on the true church. Thursday evening we addressed the Mormons in their own meeting house. This was the first time they had seen a Catholic priest. Mass was said next morning in the residence of a man who joined the church last April. They were all happy and thankful for the gift of true faith. On Monday evening services were held in the Presbyterian church. They have no preacher at present, and are not anxious to engage one. Lots of tracts were left after the sermon. There were thirty-seven questions in the box. Eight adults were again admitted into the inquiry class."

The Book That Most Influenced Him.

Sir Frank Burnand, the Catholic editor of Punch who was recently knighted, is, of course, a professional joker. While not a controversialist, he has, in his own genial way, done much to dissipate anti-Catholic prejudice in England. The Ave Maria relates, as an instance, that he once wrote a short article on "Books that Have Most Influenced Me," in which he gravely set forth that the book that had most influenced him was one that he had never read. It was a treatise on the Blessed Virgin, purchased by young Burnand without any special purpose. An irate college official appropriated it as an evil Popish thing, and sent the young man to a learned Anglican bishop to be set right in his faith. The good man expounded the [illegible] having finished, said: "Now I will explain the Roman [illegible] you," rejoined Burnand. "I will go to a Roman for that." He called on Cardinal Manning, and was shortly after received into the church. And so it was really no joke when Burnand said that the book which had most influenced him was one he had never read.

When God wished to create a dwelling place for angels, he spread out beneath them the vault of the heavens; and when he wished to create a dwelling place for himself, he formed the heart of man. Our churches, which he is pleased to consider his temples, are for him but a place of waiting; the goal to which he aims is our heart.—Msgr. de la Bouillerie.

How can we wish to be a Christian without desiring to unite ourselves with him who is the author and finisher of our faith.—Mgr. del la Bouillerie.

Perfection consists in uniting oneself to God; and the surest means of being united to God is by His communion.—St. Liguori.

Communion is a society in which interests pledge and entwine themselves.—Msgr. Baudry.

Father De Smet's Montana Mission

Rev. Victor Day of Helena Gives a Brief but Entertaining Account of the Labors of this Jesuit "Black Gown" Among the Children of the Forest in Montana Along With Some Mention of Utah.

FATHER DE SMET PREACHING TO MONTANA INDIANS.

Catholic Iroquois had taught the Flathead Indians the first rudiments of the Christian religion and aroused in them an intense desire to have some blackrobes in their midst to lead them on in the knowledge and service of the Great Spirit. From 1831 to 1839 four expeditions went forth from Bitter Root valley to St. Louis, Mo., to secure the men of prayer. In 1839 their request was granted. Father De Smet, Jesuit priest, born in Belgium in 1801, of profoundly religious and wealthy parents, presented his services to his superior. The superior felt embarrassed. He found it hard to refuse the twofold request of the Indians and Father De Smet, nor had he the means to grant their earnest petition. With one sentence the great-hearted missionary brushed aside the apparently insurmountable obstacle. "If you cannot afford to send two of us, let me go alone. I'll get the means from my home and friends in Europe." His wish was granted. On April 5, 1840, he set out for the wild far west, escorted by Ignace, one of the Flathead Indian delegates. At Westport, near Kansas City, they joined the annual expedition of the American Fur company and traveled with them as far as Green river. Here they were met by a delegation of Flathead warriors; further on, at Pierre Hole valley, a distance of 800 miles, by the bulk of the tribe. Upon his entrance into the camp he was met by men, women and children and conducted in triumph to the lodge of the great chief, who formally welcomed him with these words: "This day the Great Spirit has accomplished our wishes, and our hearts are swelled with joy. Our desire to be instructed was so great that three times we had deputed our people to the great black robe in St. Louis to obtain priests. Now, father, speak and we will comply with all that you will tell us, show us the way we have to take to go to the home of the Great Spirit."

Father De Smet's missionary labors began with the day of his arrival. He was wont to give three, four, five instructions daily. Within two months he had prepared several hundred of his Indians for baptism and instructed about 1,000 others. On the 27th of August he left the Flathead tribe with the promise to come back to them in the spring with other black robes.

Whilst on their return to St. Louis he and his escort were surrounded by a war party of Blackfeet. The meeting of the representatives of these two hostile tribes would have meant a bloody fight under ordinary circumstances. But the chief of the Blackfeet was struck by the cassock and glittering crucifix of the man of peace. "Who are you?" he asked. "He is the black robe," said one of the Flathead party, "the man who speaks to the Great Spirit." And those savages, the terror of the wilderness, carried him in triumph to their village. Father De Smet arrived in St. Louis on the eve of new year.

During this short stay among the Indians he had already established that personal ascendancy over the dusky roamers of the west, which he retained throughout his long missionary life. And yet his pathway was not invariably roses. His was a hard, up-hill walk all the way, and his road was strewn with stumbling blocks. To his career we may well apply these words of the apostle of the Gentiles: "In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils in the wilderness, in perils on the sea * * * in labor and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." II Cor. xi, 26, etc.

He returned in the spring of 1841, with two other Jesuit priests and three lay brothers of the same society. On the 24th of September they reached the site of Montana's first mission, St. Mary's in the Bitter Root valley. On the day of their arrival a huge cross was erected to commemorate the event. On the first Sunday of October the mission was formally inaugurated. A log chapel and residence were built within a few weeks' time, and before the end of October the missionaries could record that one single day had brought to their instructions representatives of twenty-four different tribes. On the third day of December one-third of the tribe were admitted to the sacrament of baptism: on Dec. 25, besides some Nez Perces and Blackfeet, 115 more Flatheads received the sacrament of regeneration.

But the missionaries had come to teach the Indians not only to prepare for the life to come, but also to eke out regular living in this world. That same fall of 1841, a piece of land was fenced in and worked for seed. Seed, consisting of a few bushels of oats, wheat and potatoes, was secured at Fort Colville, Washington, over 300 miles distant, by Father De Smet, escorted by ten Flathead warriors. The following summer a bounteous crop was raised to the amazement and delight of the children of the forest.

But what could three priests accomplish among so many tribes? The harvest was great indeed, and ripe for the sickle, but how could they gather it in? Father De Smet set about at once to supply this deficiency. Through his letters he made it known to the Christian world that willing and devoted hands were much in need to work in this promising portion of the Lord's vineyard. Besides, leaving his young flock in the care of his fellow shepherds, in 1842, the intrepid missionary plodded his way back to St. Louis, over treeless plains, through dense forests, over trackless mountains, abrupt rocks, through torrential, treacherous rivers, without other defense against the brandished tomahawk of the roving Indian than the dignity of his presence. He had not exerted himself in vain. On his arrival in St. Louis in the latter part of October, he secured the services of two more priests and a lay brother of the Society of Jesus. He escorted the missionaries some distance, and upon his return home, to his great delight, he met another missionary band, just arrived from Europe in answer to his call for laborers. He then journeyed to Europe, where he fanned the enthusiasm for his work into a blazing flame of fire. He gathered abundant means, secured four new priests, among whom was the now famous Father Ravalli, a lay brother and a colony of Sisters. They sailed from Antwerp in December, 1843, doubled Cape Horn, and reached Fort Vancouver in August, 1844. It was during this European trip that Father De Smet had an audience with Pope Gregory XVI, by whom he was offered the episcopal dignity, which the humble missionary declined. By various and persistent efforts, Father De Smet had, within four years, enlisted in the service of the Rocky mountain Indians eleven priests, six lay brothers and a colony of Sisters. He distributed them among different tribes and reserved to himself the general superintendence of the work and the unpleasant task of providing funds for the ever-increasing needs of the apostolic work. Since then, we might say, he was here, there and everywhere. Now he would help the Fathers in establishing a new mission, then he would revisit an old one, at another time he would explore unknown parts of the country and prepare new fields for labor. Again, he would ride or row back to St. Louis, cross the Atlantic, secure new men, more means in Europe, and while he journeyed and labored, he did not cease by fervent prayer to implore upon the work the blessings of the Almighty.

In the first fifteen years of his missionary life he estimated he had traveled, by land and sea, 120,000 miles, about five times the circumference of the globe. "The ability and influence of Father De Smet were cordially acknowledged by the government of the United States, and his aid was often sought in preventing Indian wars. Thus he put an end to the Sioux war and in Oregon he induced the Yakimas and other tribes, under Kamiakim, to cease hostilities. He was chaplain in the expedition to Utah, and opened new missions among tribes in that territory."—Encyclopedia of American Biography.

On the 15th of May, 1843, the secretary of war wrote to him as follows:

"The president is desirous to engage you to attend the army for Utah, to officiate as chaplain. In his opinion your services would be important, in many respects, to the public interest, particularly in the present condition of our affairs in Utah. Having sought information as to the proper person to be thus employed, his attention has been directed to you, and he has instructed me to address you on the subject in the hope that you may consider it not incompatible with your clerical duties or your personal feelings to yield to his request," etc.

As a patriotic citizen Father De Smet accepted. At the conclusion of peace his little diplomatic mission to the Indian tribes of Utah being ended, as he wrote in one of his letters, he tendered to the secretary of war his resignation of the office of chaplain. It was, however, not accepted because a new war had just broken out against the government among the tribes of the Rocky mountains. He was notified by telegraph to proceed to New York and embark there with General Harney and his staff. By the time these re-enforcements reached Vancouver the news of the cessation of hostilities and of the submission of the tribes had been received. The task remained of removing the Indian prejudices and correcting false rumors which might have brought on another war. This mission the general entrusted to Father De Smet.

Within two months the man of peace was back at Vancouver, accompanied by all the chiefs of the different mountain tribes. The object of the journey was to have them renew the treaty of peace with the general and with the superintendent of Indian affairs. The interview took place a few days later and produced most happy results on both sides. "As for me," writes Father De Smet in a letter dated St. Louis, Nov. 10, 1859, "I had accomplished among the Indians the task which the government had imposed upon me. I explained to the general my motives for desiring to return to St. Louis, by way of the interior. He acceded to my desire with the greatest affability, and in the answer he addressed to me on this matter he bore honorable testimony to my services. However," he writes further in the same letter, "I was obliged to renounce this project (viz. of riding to St. Louis), for my six horses were entirely worn out and unfit for making so long a journey; they were all more or less saddle-galled, and not being shod, their hoofs were worn in crossing the rocky bottoms of the rivers and the rough mountain roads. In this difficulty I ordered a little skiff to be made at Fort Benton. * * * On the way, along the Missouri, I met thousands of Indians of different tribes. * * * I always stopped a day or two with them. I received the greatest marks of respect and affection from these hitherto untutored children of the plains and mountains, and they listened to my words with the utmost attention."

In 1871 Father De Smet sailed again for Europe. In his native land he was made a knight of the Order of Leopold, an honor which few attain, and one which he held in common with Marshal McMahon, former president of the French republic. During this, his last journey, he met with an unfortunate accident. This, together with years of exposure, had shattered his iron constitution. After his return he wasted slowly away, and died in St. Louis in 1872. His best known works are "The Oregon Mission and Travels Over the Rocky Mountains," "Indian Letters and Sketches." His native city, Termonde, erected an imposing statue to his memory, and American history acknowledges him as the pioneer of Christianity and civilization in the northwest.

A soul can do nothing more pleasing to God than receive him frequently in the sacrament of the altar.—M. Liguori.

Dire Persecution Feared in France

Having Passed a Bill Dissolving the Religious Orders, the French Government May Also Strike a Blow at The Secular Clergy.

Vatican rumor in the midst of the French disturbance has it this week that there is a serious possibility that the French government, having at last passed a bill which will emasculate or dissolve the religious orders, will strike a blow also at the secular clergy by abrogating Napoleon's concordat of 1801. Under that stipulation all ecclesiastical property seized during the revolution was still to continue the property of the government, all bishops were to be appointed by nomination of the government, the vatican concurring, and all cures, even, were to be confirmable by the civil authority; but the government agreed to pay a reasonable stipend or "allocation," for the support of the clergy. What is now feared is that the concordat, which has been in force ever since it was signed, will be denounced by France and the clergy left with neither property nor allocation.

This intention, if it exists, would remove the last doubt as to the real motive of the present campaign against the orders. That the secular clergy, dependent as they have been upon the government, not only for advancement, but for their very bread and butter, have busied themselves as little as they know how with political concerns which might attract the lightning of government displeasure, is a matter of melancholy notoriety. That they, as well as the orders, are the objects of Premier Combes's purpose is plain enough evidence that it is Catholicism, not orders as such, that he and his allies would strike down.

Whether the concordat is to be denounced or not, moreover, there is other evidence to the same effect. Hundreds of parish priests are defendants under arrest for alleged utterances subversive of the republic.

Until now the pretense has uniformly been made that the movement against the orders was for self-protection on the part of the Republic. The familiar charge is that the religious became closely affiliated with the monarchists, and usually were able to influence the secular clergy to the same sympathy, so that under the third republic both seculars and religious were agents of disaffection. At any rate, in 1902 Leo XIII issued an encyclical calling upon the French clergy to submit and recognize the republic as the lawful government. The seculars, so M. Combes would say, became reconciled to the inevitable, but the orders did not. The fact was that while the concordat gave the government control over the secular clergy, the orders were free from such control. They might speak as they like and teach as they liked.

As early as thirty years ago a premier undertook the first step in an attempt to establish control over the monks. This was the famous "Article 7" which provided for the dissolution of the Jesuits. It failed to pass. So continuously persistent ever since has been the warfare upon the orders that the law passed last year was the thirty-third bill offered in thirty years. Some of them were grotesque. One was an inheritance tax under which when a member of an order died, the survivors paid a tax on his share in the common property. The orders resisted this, and never paid it.

In 1880, acting under an old law forbidding the assembling of more than twenty persons, religious houses were broken open by the police (with the assistance of the fire department where mediaeval portals were massive) and the seal placed upon the doors of the chapel. A Marist father of this city told the writer that three years ago he went back to Paris and the seal was still on the chapel doors, though the fathers were passing freely in and out of other entrances.

Indeed, a small number of fathers or nuns were allowed to remain in each house, as the old law entitled them to, and gradually as the excitement abated, the others, one by one, returned also, and nothing was done by the authorities.

Now the main contention of M. Waldeck-Rousseau, who framed the law of 1901, was that at least half the youth of France were being instructed at religious colleges, where they were imbued with ideas inimical to the republic, and that therefore the very bases of the nation were being undermined. It does not appear how he would explain the fact that in a country where the college-bred youth were imbibing sedition, the government should nevertheless have a majority sufficient to pass this bill by about seventy margin in the deputies over the passionate protests of Count de Mun and other defenders of the religious. But, however, that may be, the last previous important step before 1901 was the compulsory secularization of the colleges. Members of unauthorized orders must not teach in colleges. Direction of these institutions was therefore voluntarily given over to secular clergy and the monks lived outside.

Then came the new law. Under it several powerful orders were wiped out altogether. They must, or M. Combes interprets that they must, whether established or new, ask authorization by submitting to the prefect or sub-prefect a full statement of the names of members, property, income, rules and other details. Some of the orders engaged mainly in charities have not hesitated to take this step, and are authorized. Others, such as the Jesuits, are morally certain of refusal, and are aware that if they furnish the information required it will merely be used against them. The act in such cases dissolves the order and distributes its property to the heirs who would have received it if the original donor had not given it to the order. These orders have dissolved, and their members are scattered as individuals throughout France. Even then, as private citizens, they have been arrested for teaching classes of boys in their apartments. Religious, on the other hand, whose purpose is that of the recluse dwelling in community, have, upon dissolution, no reason left for existence. Their vows are still upon them, but the state forbids the observance. These orders have withdrawn from the country. Their situation has been described by a distinguished English Jesuit, the Rev. Herbert Thurston:

"The French government may or may not think fit in their munificence to bestow pensions on the dispersed monks and nuns. But can they give them back their youth, can they find them husbands and wives, or make the very idea of marriage tolerable to them; can they provide them anew in middle age with the love and affection of that home life which they freely bartered for certain spiritual goods, now to be taken away from them by force of law?"

Topping all the severities of the association law is the article 12, in which a direct blow is struck at vatican influence. This section provides that the council of ministers may authorize the president to dissolve any association "composed for the greater part of foreigners, those having foreign administrators, or their legal domicile abroad."

Order after order has been decreed for suppression, and the dispatches this week say that the schools where the unauthorized nuns are teaching have now been closed in nearly every department, the final evictions taking place with militia and stone masons supporting the police, and the "seditious" nuns accompanied upon their pathetic departure by gentlewomen of France, who walk courageously by their side.

What the religious assert is that protection to the republican form of government is a pretext. Nobody, religious, secular or lay, is opposed to the republic. That issue is dead. The men in power, say the monks, are of the Free Masons; the term being used in religious controversy to embrace all influential secret societies. From the beginning it was men of this class, seeking power, who organized and carried on the campaign against the monks. At last they are in control, and they mean to stay in control. The "sedition" of which they accuse the religious, is really the teachings of opposition to an anti-Christian alliance.

"Read," said a French priest in Boston this week, "the first article of the law: 'An association is the agreement by which two or more persons permanently unite their knowledge or activity or some other object than pecuniary profit.' Is there anything in that definition which excludes a Masonic order from the terms of the law? Watch," he added, significantly, "and see how many Masonic lodges make a complete statement of their rules, as required by this act."—Boston Republic.